



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources and Environment

Environmental Justice Fact Sheet

What does Environmental Justice mean:

That all people, including minority and low income individuals, will be provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are made; be allowed to share in the benefits of the decision and not excluded from them; and not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment.

What were the Milestones of Environmental Justice:

Three major actions taken to include Environmental Justice in the way that NRCS does business:

February 11, 1994 - President Clinton issues Executive Order 12898 "Federal Action to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations."

March 14, 1994 - USDA issues its Environmental Justice Implementation Strategy. The strategy is designed so that environmental justice principles and initiatives are incorporated into Departmental Programs, policies, planning, public participation processes, and enforcement.

December 15, 1997 - USDA issues its Environmental Justice Implementation Strategy. The strategy is designed so that environmental justice principles and initiatives are incorporated into Departmental Programs, policies, planning, public participation processes, and enforcement.

How do we determine what is and what is not an Environmental Justice Impact:

An environmental justice issue arises where conduct or action may involve a disproportionately high and adverse environmental or human health effect on an identifiable low-income or minority population. The determination of whether a particular program or activity raises an environmental justice issue depends on an evaluation of all of the circumstances.

In determining whether there are disproportionately high and adverse environmental or human health effects, including social economic effects, on an identifiable low-income or minority population, agencies should consider, as appropriate, such effects as: bodily impairment, infirmity, illness or death; air, noise, and water pollution and soil contamination; destruction or disruption of man-made or natural resources; destruction or diminution of aesthetic values; destruction or disruption of community cohesion or a community's economic vitality; destruction or disruption of availability of public and private facilities and services; displacement of persons, businesses, farms, or nonprofit organizations; isolation, exclusion, or separation of minority or low-income individuals within a given community or from the broader community; and the denial, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of, benefits of USDA programs or activities. In determining if an effect on a minority and/or a low income population is disproportionately high and

adverse, agencies should consider whether the adverse effect is appreciably more severe or greater in magnitude than the adverse effect that will be suffered by the non-minority population and/or non-low-income population.

The Departmental Regulation 5600-2 provides a process that is useful in the determination of whether a particular program or activity raises an environmental justice issue when the proposed action is not subject to NEPA (Appendix D). It also provides information on incorporating environmental justice into agency's existing NEPA procedures (Appendix E).

What are some Examples of Environmental Justice:

1. When there are communities that have been exposed to large chemical factories, being built within the perimeters of their communities. The company is dumping toxic and life threatening waste causing illnesses; (such as asthma, heart problems, cancer and other respiratory problems) within a one year period and that had not been a common problem for the community

previously. The community was not included in the public meetings or hearings held for the decision to build the factory until all the legal work had been approved by the county and the state in which the action took place. The community was at a disadvantage about the decision to build the factory, because they were not informed of important meetings that would effect there living environment.

2. When a customer's land has been damaged by a structure, lagoon system, or wells that a federal agency installed, and the agency did not provide the proper upkeep of the structure. Over the years the structural system caused erosion or run off to the landowner's property causing it to be a wetland or unworkable land. After informing the appropriate officials about the matter, the customer has noted that no action is being taken, but he or she is being accused of negligence.

In all our activities we need to assure the customer or the landowner that we are willing to help and assist within the authority of Environmental Justice and consistent with other NRCS programs responsibilities and roles.